

Lake County News-Sun, January 17, 2009

People tend to put aside partisan politics during historical events.

Samantha Lee, a 17-year-old senior at Vernon Hills High School who canvassed for former Republican presidential candidate John McCain, wasted no time requesting tickets to President-elect Barack Obama's swearing-in ceremony.

"I requested them at 11 p.m. on Election Day, right after the results came in. I wanted to be first in line," she said. "It's the election of the first African-American president, and I want to be there."

Samantha received two tickets from U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, at his Northbrook office on Friday. Samantha, who had an internship with Kirk's office last year, will be taking her 16-year-old sister, Nattie.

Kirk received requests for tickets to the ceremony from nearly 1,000 constituents, but members of Congress were given only 198 tickets each. To represent the diversity of the 10th District, Kirk gave the tickets to students, local officials and religious leaders that included both Democrats and Republicans.

"On Tuesday there are no Republicans or Democrats, just Americans," Kirk said.

The tickets are mostly for the standing-room only area behind the reflecting pool in front of the Capitol building steps, where the swearing-in ceremony will take place.

Eugene Roberson, senior pastor at First Corinthian Missionary Baptist Church in North Chicago, will be flying out on Monday with his silver ticket to the swearing-in ceremony. He noted the significance of Obama taking office on the day after Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

"Martin Luther King predicted it in his 'I have a dream' speech," Roberson said. "The dream has come true...But it had been in the making for a long time."

Roberson plans to stay with relatives in the Washington, D.C., area.

Shields Township Supervisor Charles Fitzgerald plans to drive the 750 miles to Washington to attend the swearing-in ceremony or pass his ticket on to a friend, depending on his father's health.

"I think it's exciting for Illinois, in light of what's happening in Springfield," Fitzgerald said, alluding to the recent Illinois House vote to impeach Gov. Rod Blagojevich. "It's one extreme high and one extreme low."

Kirk announced that he will host an open house at his Washington office for 10th District residents on Tuesday. Warm refreshments will be served. His office is in the Longworth House Office Building, Room 1030.